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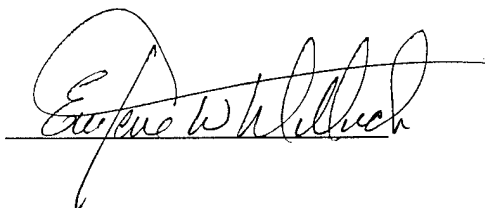| 19.Telephone: 841-2245	20.Office Symbol: 1

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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AVERTING A PENDING DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL
CRISIS: THE NEED FOR A CORPORATE RECRUITING STRATEGY

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College for competition in the
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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
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ABSTRACT

AVERTING A PENDING DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL CRISIS: THE NEED FOR A CORPORATE RECRUITING STRATEGY

In the next two decades the Department of Defense faces a potential civilian personnel crisis, that of an increasingly aging workforce and a shrinking labor pool. The average age of a DOD civilian employee is currently 45.2, and within the next few years the first wave of the baby boomer generation will reach retirement age. In fact, 30 percent of the federal workforce will be eligible to retire by 2006 with an additional 20 percent that could seek early retirement if budgetary constraints dictated it be offered. Within the Navy, 47 percent of engineers, 55 percent of scientists and 70 percent of computer specialists will be retirement eligible by 2007. With such a large percentage of its civilian workforce eligible to retire, the DOD needs to revitalize its civilian recruiting efforts. A suggested approach is to adopt a marketing based corporate recruiting strategy similar to that currently being used by many successful business leaders. In a marketing based recruiting strategy, success means understanding what employees want, developing and promoting a corporate image that conveys what your agency offers relative to prospective employee desires, and then delivering that image to target audiences in order to attract a quality hire.

Since the mid-1990's, the military services have worked aggressively to meet enlisted recruiting goals. Numerous studies were undertaken as the services sought new ways to attract their share of a shrinking labor market. Further hampering their efforts was a declining interest in military service among American youth. To counter this declining interest the services took a fresh approach to marketing. For example, the Air Force sponsored the Wood Brothers' Racing Team (their #21 car sports the Air Force logo) in an effort to attract 18 to 24-year old NASCAR fans with a mechanical background, and a new advertising campaign by the Army produced the slogan, "An Army of One." These strategies appear to be paying off; in 2001 the services met their recruiting goals for the first time in several years. Now in the coming decade the Department of Defense faces a new potential personnel crisis, that of an aging civilian workforce. The average federal employee age is currently 45, and within the next few years the first wave of the baby boomer generation will reach retirement age. In fact, 30 percent of the federal workforce will be eligible to retire by 2006, with an additional 20 percent that could seek early retirement if budgetary constraints dictated it be offered.[1] Defense Department civilian personnel demographics largely mirror these federal-wide statistics; with such a large percentage of its civilian workforce eligible to retire, the DOD needs to revitalize its civilian recruiting efforts. A suggested approach is to adopt a corporate recruiting strategy similar to that used by many successful business leaders.

Overview of the Challenge

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) cites an aging workforce and a decline in the number of young workers available as being among the most important demographic changes expected in the early part of the new century.[2] Bureau of Labor Statistics projections for 2005 put the 35 year and older age group as making up 63 percent of the labor

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force, and the Federal workforce tends to be slightly older than the U.S. labor force in general.[3] As one of the largest employers of Federal civil servants, the DOD is not exempt from experiencing an aging workforce. In fact, the average age of the DOD's 669,400 civilians is even slightly higher than that of the rest of the Federal workforce (46.8 years old for the DOD versus 45.2 for other Federal employees).[4] While not yet a crisis, this aging workforce is a cause for concern and an issue the DOD must manage in the near future.

With the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and ending of the Cold War, the DOD instituted widespread hiring freezes and reduction in force (RIF) programs as a way to draw down its civilian workforce and meet reduced manpower ceilings. The result of these efforts was a general aging of the workforce as hiring freezes kept new workers from entering and RIF programs tended to displace younger workers because of tenure rules.[5] An examination of Navy and Air Force civilian personnel statistics (chosen because both services employ a large number of civilians in their aviation depots) reveals the potential seriousness of the aging workforce dilemma.

Of the Navy's 182,000 civilian employees approximately 100,000 (55 percent) are 45 years old or older, an increase of 7 percentage points since 1993. The average age of a Navy civilian is 47.1 years and he/she has 17.3 years of Federal service. More alarming is the number of personnel in highly technical career fields that are becoming eligible for retirement. By 2007, 47 percent of engineers, 55 percent of scientists and 70 percent of computer specialists employed by the U.S. Navy will be eligible to retire. Current hiring projections come nowhere close to being able to fill these vacancies.[6]

The Air Force faces the same alarming trend among its 134,000 civilians. The average age of an Air Force civilian is 46.1 years and he/she has 16.7 years of civil service

employment. Almost 7,000 are currently eligible to retire and within the next five years an additional 24,500 employees (approximately 18 percent) will be retirement eligible.[7] Air Force Materiel Command, which employs the largest number of Air Force civilians in its aircraft depots and engineering/science directorates, is in danger of facing a virtual crisis as nearly 70 percent of its civilian workforce is eligible to retire between now and 2010.[8] Personnel directors within the Air Force do not believe all those who become eligible will choose to retire, but there is enough concern that the Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. James Roche, convened a summit meeting with senior civilian personnel managers in November 2001 to discuss the challenge.[9]

At the same time this workforce aging is occurring, slower population growth over the past two decades within the United States is leading to a smaller number of available entry-level workers. Discounting illegal immigrants, the pool of available labor is simply shrinking. Even with the current economic slowdown unemployment rates are still the lowest they have been since the mid 1970's.[10] Recent indicators also point to the current slowdown as being just a minor economic correction; there is no reason to believe the unprecedented expansion of the past two decades will not continue. Continued growth in the U.S. economy due to forces of globalization when coupled with this smaller workforce suggests the competition for high quality workers will grow even keener. People are a company's primary source of competitive advantage, so finding and keeping good employees is more important than ever. Corporate America understands there has never been a greater urgency to improve recruiting and retention; the Department of Defense must also recognize this and plan accordingly.

One danger is with other major personnel and modernization programs competing for

attention the military services will defer action on problems associated with an older workforce and declining labor pool until they become critical. To compete in tomorrow's tight labor market and meet future recruitment challenges, the DOD must begin to move beyond long-standing civilian recruitment programs that were used in past years. Recruiting practices which worked reasonably well in the past will no longer be successful in attracting quality workers to federal employment, especially when private industry is perceived as offering equally challenging work, greater flexibility and potentially higher rewards. Simply posting notices of vacancies and requesting submission of an application will no longer be sufficient to meet personnel requirements. In the coming decade the DOD must aggressively recruit to get quality workers; adapting a new corporate recruiting strategy currently being used by major business leaders across the country is a good place to start.

DOD Adoption of a Contemporary Corporate Recruiting Strategy

Recruitment is the process of communicating an organization to potential employees. In the past recruiting was about selling the organization to quality candidates. However, in today's environment selling has been replaced with marketing as a more successful business practice. Whereas selling involves developing a product or service with little assessment of the customers' desires and then using sales tactics to push it, marketing focuses on the customer first. The basis of marketing is understanding needs/wants and then developing, promoting, and delivering products that meet those needs/wants.[11] This same concept being used for products has transformed corporate recruiting. In a marketing based recruiting strategy, success means understanding what employees want, developing and promoting a corporate image that conveys what your agency offers relative to prospective employee desires, and then delivering that image to target audiences in order to attract a quality hire.[12]

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Modern marketing stresses focusing on the wants of the customer as the key to success. In recruiting, the customer is the potential employee, and in today's environment the wants of the employee have changed. While compensation used to be everything, these days corporate culture is receiving greater scrutiny. Corporate cultural, which includes attributes such as job content and satisfaction, the opportunity to contribute meaningfully, and a challenging atmosphere, is now cited as a prime motivator. A recent survey by Russell Reynolds Associates, an executive search firm in Washington D.C., showed corporate culture now rivals compensation and benefits in terms of importance.[13] Capitalizing on developing a great corporate culture is what has made companies like Microsoft an employer of choice. The best people know it does not take any more effort to work for a great company, so the single most important strategy for recruiting today is to have the reputation of being one of the leading employers, an employer of choice, in the marketplace.[14]

Over the past several years numerous studies of successful corporations revealed specific features of a great organizational culture that lead to a reputation of being the best. The most common of these features, and the ones that seem to have the most impact in terms of employee satisfaction and recruiting appeal, are discussed in Franklin Ashby's and Arthur Pell's book, <u>Embracing Excellence: Become an Employer of Choice to Attract the Best Talent</u>.[15] First, company employees in these organizations portray an almost missionary zeal. From the CEO down to the lowest paid hourly worker, enthusiasm and excitement are seen throughout the organization. Although all indications are that it may no longer exist at Walmart due to the firm's rapid expansion, in the early years at Walmart Sam Walton instilled this characteristic.[16] Great organizations also show a sense of pride, sincerity and customer assistance focus. Home Depot has capitalized on this feature, leading to it gaining

an ever increasing share of the home improvement market.[17] A third feature of market leaders is employees display an attitude of constructive discontent, that is, they are not complacent and are always looking for ways to improve the way business is conducted.[18] A value based mind-set and management style is another characteristic of an excellent organizational culture. Firms that display this feature emphasize values and ideals; Merck Pharmaceuticals epitomizes this concept by setting up programs to provide drugs to third world countries free of charge.[19] Successful companies also emphasize creativity and innovation and foster a sense of high expectations and professional standards.[20] Lastly, organizations with a culture of excellence focus on building relationships within their local communities. They encourage active involvement in the local community through volunteer work and the support of philanthropic causes.[21]

It is beyond the scope of this paper to accomplish a detailed examination of what efforts the Department of Defense has made in striving to understand what future potential civilian employees want and in developing an organizational culture that will attract quality workers. It is also beyond the scope of this paper to examine which if any of the features of a great organizational culture described in Embracing Excellence the DOD may possess. Certainly within the Defense Department itself most civilian employees would agree the organization shares a sense of pride and cooperation. Likewise within each of the military services there is a sense of high expectations and professional standards. So while each and every organization within the DOD may not exhibit all these features, overall the Defense Department seems to meet the criteria needed to establish a reputation as an employer of choice. Also, each of the services has developed its own culture which it successfully promotes. For the Air Force, the draw has always been technology, and to a large degree the

service has used technology to define its culture. This practice should continue as shown by a job satisfaction survey conducted in 2001, in which Air Force Materiel Command scientists and engineers consistently noted that the Air Force provided opportunities to work with cutting edge technology and to be the world's experts on systems that will make a difference in national security.[22] However, this job satisfaction, the opportunity to contribute, and the challenge of being involved with cutting edge technology has not reversed declining Air Force civilian recruiting and retention rates. Also, it is still too early to tell whether positive public opinion of the Defense Department, and the federal government in general, following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 will translate into improved recruitment. There appears to be a higher opinion of the government now; however, as the economy recovers and the unemployment picture improves, any potential higher calling to national service may be negated by the financial lure of private sector jobs.

Given the revelations of Air Force Materiel Command civilian workforce surveys, it is safe to say that with the inception of the quality movement in the late 1980's the federal government made significant strides in understanding what its employees want and in fostering an improved organizational culture to meet those desires; these efforts should continue. To meet future recruiting requirements and become an employer of choice the federal government and the Defense Department must also seek to develop and promote a more positive corporate image.

Ask the average American on the street to give you his perception of government and the adjective that comes immediately to mind will probably be bureaucracy or "red tape". Public servants have largely come to be symbolized as mediocre workers who produce just

enough to get by, who can't be fired, and who are motivated by job security and a comfortable, guaranteed retirement. Obviously this is not true, but the perception persists as evidenced by the recent debate over federalizing airport security workers.

The negative image of civil service that emerged in the 1970's still exists today and is perpetuated by both politicians and the press. NBC News' "Fleecing of America" series is just one example of the press continuing the notion of fraud, waste, and abuse associated with the federal bureaucracy. Even candidates for Congress (and the Presidency) over the past few years have begun running on platforms of being a Washington outsider to avoid this stigma. Also of particular concern is the fact academia has not treated government service any more favorably than the press over the past two decades. Public administration and public policy programs are no longer popular majors on college campuses as evidenced by a dramatic decline in enrollment.[23] This is unfortunate since academic institutions (whether colleges or vocational schools) are the primary source from which new employees will come. The impact of this widespread negative perception of public service will be a diminished ability by the DOD to successfully recruit civil servants in the coming years.

Though somewhat dated, there is evidence of the adverse impact on recruiting caused by poor public perception of the federal bureaucracy. In a report titled "College Students' Perceptions of the Federal Government as an Employer" submitted during a hearing to the Committee on Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, Rosslyn S. Keeman, Director, Federal Workforce Future Issues, U.S. General Accounting Office, revealed:

- In a 1988 survey of Harvard's senior class, only seven percent of graduates expressed an interest in a career in government.

- A national survey of honor society graduates in the liberal arts, business and

sciences/engineering ranked potential federal government service fourth out of six possible employment alternatives. More than 70 percent of the students said the federal government does not offer a good chance for responsibility early in a career, and 86 percent said federal jobs were routine and monotonous, would not allow them to use their abilities fully, and that civil service offered little opportunity for initiative or creativity.

■ A general failure across college campuses to communicate a positive message about the value of public life and the intrinsic rewards of government service.[24]

Poor quality of life leading to low morale is also often cited as a detractor for federal service. Again, while it is dated, a 1989 GAO survey showed that only 13 percent of government employees would recommend a career in public service. Some of the responses to the survey included comments such as, "I have 29 years of civil service employment and today, more than ever, I hate to admit to anyone that I work for the Federal Government. Working conditions and employee morale are at their lowest," and "Under no circumstances will I allow my children to consider a civil service career."[25]

Hopefully the perception of civil service as a career choice has improved since these reports were published early in the last decade. Public opinion polls following Operation DESERT STORM and continuing through the current war on terrorism show the Department of Defense in a positive light, but how this will translate into new employment applications in the coming years as the aging workforce begins to retire is unclear. What is clear is the need for all members of the Defense Department to continue to develop an improved organizational culture and to promote a positive corporate image.

People will work for the federal government and the Department of Defense if they

regard what they are doing as important work. The public service community can compete with the private sector for employees by emphasizing the intangible rewards inherent in its work--attributes such as service to nation and a higher calling for the betterment of all Americans. As those of us in uniform know, government service can be intrinsically rewarding. This theme needs to be promulgated.

How should this theme be promoted? In marketing, the promotion of a product is done through what is known as branding. That is, an identifying slogan is created for the product, one that when advertised will stick in the public's mind.[26] Branding an organization follows the same concept. An identifying slogan or phrase is created that becomes a verbal expression of the corporate image. A successful brand is one that transmits the essence of the organization to viewers both quickly and thoroughly. It should project an organization's vision and communicate values that are both compelling and motivational. Most importantly, this information must be integrated into a bold statement that is easily recognizable so as to compete for the attention of a target audience. As more of its aging workforce elects to retire, the federal government may need to create a "brand" to convey its values so as to attract potential employees.

Conveying the federal government "brand" will be a challenge. Leadership must set the stage, starting with the President, Cabinet members and Congress. Political leaders and others who shape public opinion (such as the media) should articulate and reinforce the rewards of public service and portray the civil servant as a respected member of a system that is an essential part of government. Television and radio public service announcements by the President and Congressional leaders might be one way to positively highlight Federal employment. Public service can be challenging and rewarding, and the opportunity to

contribute to public policy, even if in only a small way, is appealing to many in society. If these intangibles are promoted in a positive way, government can compete in the coming decades for the best and brightest of America's college and vocational school graduates.

After developing and promoting a corporate image that conveys what it stands for the Department of Defense must deliver that message to target audiences in order to attract quality hires. This is the essence of a marketing based recruiting strategy. It involves understanding workforce demographics and emerging technologies for reaching workers, identifying recruiting markets (where the talent is), and then establishing long-term relationships with targeted institutions using professional recruitment teams.[27]

In modern marketing, companies conduct extensive research to gain knowledge about customer demographics before developing and promoting a product. For example, automobile companies saw the trend toward an increasingly prosperous middle class moving to the suburbs. At the same time there was a growing popularity of organized after school activities (sports, music, dance lessons, etc.) to which youth could no longer walk as children did when living in cities near neighborhood boys and girls clubs. This changing demographic gave rise to what has become known as the "soccer mom," parents who required roomier vehicles for shuttling their children from one activity to another. The automobile industry responded with the minivan and SUVs, vehicles which are still gaining in popularity.

Marketing an organization requires the same effort. The first step to effective recruiting is for a firm to fully understand the types of employees it needs and what skills and knowledge these future employees need to succeed.[28] After a firm fully understands the types of employees it needs and what skills these employees must possess, the firm must then understand and even anticipate the needs and desires of the workers it is trying to recruit if it

expects to compete successfully.[29] To accomplish this requires performing periodic profiles of target candidates in order to know their job acceptance criteria and what marketing concepts (glitzy advertising or more sublime messages) they respond to. If it expects to compete successfully for the future quality worker the DOD must take the same approach. As for periodic profiles of target employees, much of this type of information already exists; the DOD would not be required to undertake extensive studies on its own. There are a broad range of surveys on labor and employee trends conducted for the general marketing industry that the DOD could use. An example of one such survey is "Monitoring the Future," an annual survey of lifestyles among young people conducted by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.[30]

The Department of Defense must also understand the role of emerging technology on recruiting and be willing to embrace new technologies. Technology is now a key factor in winning the recruiting battle. Youth today are technology savvy, and they will respond to technology recruiting. An absolute must for DOD agencies in the current employment market is a recruitment web site that contains information such as future industry needs, pay potential, and essential skills employees will need to succeed. Other technology medium gaining popularity include corporate chat rooms and Internet video interviews. Not all of these emerging technologies will be applicable to the DOD, but recruitment agencies should be aware of their existence and remain flexible enough to capitalize on them as necessary.

Once workforce demographics are understood the next step is to identify recruiting markets (go to where the talent is) and establish long-term relationships with targeted institutions using professional recruiting teams. As the Defense Department is increasingly a technology corporation, it is likely almost all future hires will come from colleges or

vocational schools. Very few new employees will be accessed right out of high school.

Knowing that most future hires will come from colleges or vocational schools gives the DOD

established suppliers for future talent. And since hiring within the DOD is largely

decentralized it is relatively easy for individual agencies to identify local recruiting sources.

The key to capitalizing on recruitment sources in a marketing based strategy is to

view the sources as suppliers and build long-term relationships with them. Dr. Edward

Deming, the recognized founder of the Total Quality Movement, proposed as one of his

tenets the importance of improving supplier relationships. For Deming, this included the

suppliers of labor.[31] This is important because the most common reason recruiting among

educational institutions fails is that firms neglect to build relationships with institutions, their

faculty and student groups.

Ways to build relationships with educational institutions vary and some are more

successful than others, but a key ingredient is presence.[32] Effective presence is more than

just being there, it is being there with professional recruitment teams that portray your

corporate image. First contact with an organization strongly shapes a prospective employee's

decision to pursue or abandon an employment opportunity, and in the past the federal

government has often been too cavalier about this simple tenet. Office of Personnel

Management recruitment centers are often staffed with personnel officers who do little more

than hand out brochures. This simply won't work in the future. To meet recruitment

requirements in tomorrow's competitive labor market the DOD must increase recruiter

presence in educational institutions and improve strategies for accessing quality talent.

Increasing recruiter presence is an absolute must if the federal government wants to

compete for the best talent. To get the best students recruiters must recognize the recruitment

process is all about image, and it is hard to build an image on campuses if you are not present. Successful corporations have discovered many ways to accomplish this. Some of the techniques DOD agencies could use include:

- Having senior executive officers join school departmental advisory boards.

- Fostering relationships with instructors by hosting facility visits, providing plant tours, allowing faculty to attend department training classes, etc.--anything that will get them to talk about the agency in classes which might pique the interest of students.

- Holding career fairs and hosting professional development and career seminars.

- Develop an Email-mentoring program where senior employees can mentor students who are potentially interested in employment after graduation.

While increasing recruiter presence is vital to successfully compete in today's tough labor market, the DOD must also improve strategies for accessing quality talent. One of the most important ways the DOD could improve the accession of quality talent from educational institutions is by expanding student employment programs such as internships and cooperative educational programs, since research shows those who enter federal service through these avenues are more likely to stay on in government service.[33] Some DOD agencies already do this quite effectively. For instance, the Air Force's Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center, an aviation depot, established a successful partnership with an area vocational school.[34] The depot provides work programs for students specializing in aviation applicable fields such as electronics and sheet metal/structural repair, and guarantees a specified number of full time positions upon graduation. This arrangement built an established pipeline for future mission critical occupations at Tinker Air Force Base; programs such as this one should be encouraged throughout the DOD, especially for hard to

hire fields such as engineers and scientists.

Simply increasing campus presence and expanding cooperative work programs will not be enough to sustain successful recruiting. To be effective recruiters, must be trained by professional human resource agencies. These trained recruitment teams must then be kept current on the realities of the labor market and the latest recruiting practices and techniques. Recruiting should also involve managers and executives, not just the trained recruitment teams. Often the most effective recruiters are those senior managers who are challenged by public service and can relay that challenge to prospective employees.

In conclusion, the Department of Defense faces a potential personnel crisis in the coming decade due to an aging workforce and a declining number of available young workers. In fact, this trend and the problems it creates is among the most important demographic changes expected in the early part of the new century. This picture does not have to be completely bleak for the Defense Department, though; there is time to manage the civilian personnel system and overhaul recruitment in order to avert a pending crisis. The DOD should start by adopting a corporate recruiting strategy such as that being used by leading companies across the country. By understanding what employees want, developing and promoting a corporate image that conveys what the Defense Department offers relative to prospective employee desires, and then delivering that image to target audiences, the DOD can compete for the best of America's youth.

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